

# French Socialists join hands with international terrorism

by Thierry Lalevée

A few weeks prior to French parliamentary elections that the Socialist government of François Mitterrand is expected to lose, the French political scene has been rocked by a series of political scandals. Most of these concerned the fate of the French hostages held in Lebanon by Shi'ite terrorists for approximately a year now. In the footsteps of Jimmy Carter, the French Socialists are praying that a release of the hostages, just prior to the elections, will hand them a sweeping electoral victory through a national wave of joy and relief.

Carter didn't fare well with this ploy, and the French Socialists are not expected to be more successful.

However, on the eve of elections, hopes die hard. As the press has unveiled, this hope has led the Socialist government to go a very long way toward meeting the demands of both the Shi'ite kidnapers, and the countries that back them—Libya, Syria, and Iran. Ever since Pierre Joxe, a founding member of the Franco-Libyan Friendship Association, became interior minister three years ago, France has become a safe-haven for international terrorism.

Joxe rationalized his doctrine in early February, explaining that for such reasons, France was not itself a target of terrorism. Speaking on Feb. 5, as several Parisian shopping centers were being destroyed by bombs, Joxe explained that France was “only the battleground” of Middle Eastern factions. French institutions are rarely targeted, he stated, and members of the French terrorist group Direct Action are only “misled young men.”

## Deals with terrorist states

Clearly, new French efforts to please the Shi'ites represent no sudden and fundamental shift in policy. However, as political defeat looms closer, all pretense has been pushed aside in a desperate attempt to pull the successful political coup that the hostages' release would represent.

Mitterrand has been organizing one international conference after another in Paris to boost the prestige of French Socialism—though these conferences have had such an electoral flavor that none of the foreign guests could miss it.

Consistent with political compromises with Libya, Syria, and Iran, during the Feb. 17 Paris conference of French-speaking countries, Mitterrand let it be known that he wanted Tunisian Prime Minister Mohammed M'zali out of office. Mitterrand and the International Monetary Fund were infuriated at M'zali's recent tour of Black Africa, which resulted in the establishment of a closer “South-South” political dialogue, as well as numerous barter deals which Paris considers a threat to its monopoly.

Another victim of Mitterrand's wrath at the same conference was Lebanese President Amin Gemayel. The French President flatly rejected Gemayel's demand that he be permitted to make a speech which would underline Lebanon's national independence and commitment to the West.

The reasons for Mitterrand's refusal soon became apparent. On Feb. 18, the Socialist-connected daily *Libération* published a three-page interview with Syria's President Hafez al Assad. The following day, *Libération* had another page of analysis of Assad's interview, heralding the Syrian leader and granting him the very odd title, “Bismarck of the Arab World.” As an observer remarked, Bismarck unified Germany; what is Assad supposed to unify—Syria and Lebanon?

Ingenuously, Assad told *Libération* how Syria “has never allowed any Lebanese faction to dominate all others.” However, Syria's takeover of Lebanon was not the issue of the interview; Franco-Syrian relations were. Assad praised to high heavens his “working relationship” with Mitterrand, especially since the kidnapping of the French hostages.

## The hostage gambit

Damascus has become one of the main capitals involved in the negotiations for the hostages' release. What is Assad's price? Mitterrand's refusal to allow Lebanon an independent voice at his conference was certainly part of the deal—a de facto recognition of Syrian sovereignty over Lebanon.

Assad's price converges on many points with Iran's demands. Officially, Iran claims not to be holding the French hostages, but only that it may potentially have some influence

on the kidnapers. For such influence to be exerted, Paris has to offer something to make it all worth the mullahs' while. By the end of December 1985, Teheran made it clear that the first part of the package was at least \$1 billion, that is, the amount of the 1975 loan by the Shah of Iran to the French side of the "Eurodif" nuclear project. Paris's commitment to begin repaying the loan, with interest, would set Iranian influence on the kidnapers into motion.

However, there's more. Iran wants French weapons. On Feb. 28, *Ouest France*, the regional newspaper, revealed that France has begun the routine export of weapons to Iran, under the cover of weapons exports to Thailand. This has included both light weapons and ammunition, as well as spare parts.

On Jan. 6, a shadowy deal involving the French Paribas bank, Argentina, and Libya was exposed. A French firm, Alsthom, claimed it was repairing three British-built Argentine frigates to be bartered to Libya in return for oil. Investigations revealed that the ultimate recipient of the frigates, however, was Iran, which had offered \$400 million for them in 1985.

But there are many other demands. For example, the actual kidnapers in Lebanon have officially requested the immediate release from French jails of four international terrorists; Abdallah Ibrahim, leader of the Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Faction involved in the murder of several American officers in Europe; Anis Naccash, the leader of a Shi'ite commando unit which tried to assassinate former Iranian Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar in July 1980, and well as two leaders of the Armenian ASALA terrorist organization, involved in a massacre at Orly airport in July 1983.

To make these demands more concrete, a wave of bombings rocked the French capital between Feb. 3 and Feb. 6. As in December 1985, the targets were crowded shopping malls. A bookshop was actually destroyed, and a real massacre was narrowly averted when a bomb was defused on the Eiffel Tower. The bombings were claimed by a previously unknown "Solidarity Committee with Arab Political Prisoners in France." It demanded the release of the four terrorists.

Indications of the source included the fact that the terrorists wrapped one of their bombs in the same Kuwaiti newspaper that had been found around a bomb of their bombs in the same Kuwaiti newspaper that had been found around a bomb last December, and used the same kind of explosive as was used against the French embassy in Kuwait in December 1983.

Under such pressure, the French cabinet convened on Feb. 5, and decided to release two members of an Abu Nidal commando unit that had assassinated the PLO representative in Paris in August 1978, Ezzedin Kalak. Their release was only announced on Feb. 17, when they were already on their way to Tripoli, Libya. By way of explanation, the French government argued that they had not perpetrated terrorist actions against French targets and that they already had served

half of their 15-year jail sentences. But this good will gesture to Abu Nidal and his protectors, Qaddafi and Assad, still provoked an outcry when it was made known. It was entirely clear that the Socialists had backed down to terrorist blackmail.

Similarly, on Feb. 24, it was revealed that a leading member of the Lebanese Hezbollah, responsible for the October 1983 kamikaze operations against the French and American compounds in Beirut, which killed hundreds of soldiers, had been in Paris. U.S. intelligence services, it was reported, had sent an urgent telex and a full file on the terrorist, one Imad Muganiyah, requesting his immediate arrest. As French police began to close in, Foreign Minister Roland Dumas and the Elysée (presidential palace) intervened to prevent any action. According to the confidential newsletter, *Mardi Matin*, Dumas claimed that Muganiyah was an "important intermediary" in the negotiations to "obtain the hostages' release before March 16"—the date of the parliamentary elections.

But, there is more. Very early in those same negotiations, the French government chose Swiss banker François Genoud, Hitler's literary executor and leader of the Nazi International, as one of the mediators in the negotiations.

Considering Genoud's activities, he has an obsession with secrecy, and has never publicly spoken on the matter. But, his "Islamic fundamentalist" protégé, former Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella, has been more public on the matter. In mid-December, he promised on French television that the hostages would be released by Christmas or New Year. At the end of January, he was traveling to Teheran for talks on the matter. What they are receiving in return is a matter of speculation, but there is little doubt that Genoud and Ben Bella are playing for high political stakes.

The involvement of Ben Bella, exiled from Algeria, as a mediator for France is a political coup of sorts against the Algerian government of President Chadli Benjedid.

The French government's shenanigans in this regard are all the more cynical, when one considers that most of those arrested during the early February wave of bombs in Paris, belonged to the "New Ben Bella Network," as *France Soir* reported on Feb. 13.

*Le Figaro* also ran a three-day series of exposés on the Genoud/Ben Bella network, though carefully omitting their names. For obscure reasons, the editors of the conservative *Le Figaro* has ordered its journalists to never print their names. The same *Le Figaro* ran a four-page interview of Qaddafi on Feb. 22, most favorable to his views.

On top of all this pre-election gamesmanship with terrorists, it turns out that the lawyer for the imprisoned Abdallah Ibrahim, as well as the two Armenians, is none other than Jacques Vergès. Vergès, often dubbed the "lawyer of Carlos," was also chosen by Genoud to be the lawyer for the Nazi "Butcher of Lyons," Klaus Barbie. And—in mid-February, the families of the French hostages in Lebanon hired as their lawyer . . . Jacques Vergès.